
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	541 7th Street, SE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	March 28, 2013	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	13-211	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Frances McMillen	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Owner Ditto Residential, LLC requests concept design review for a third story addition to a two-story rear ell wing at 541 7th Street, SE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

541 7th Street was originally constructed in 1857-58 as a two-story frame semi-detached residence with a side gable roof. Its current appearance is of a Queen Anne style cottage, probably as a result of a renovation around 1890. At that time, a decorative center cross gable with cross bracing and slightly projecting second floor bay were added to the front elevation and Queen Anne styled double hung windows were installed. A two-story frame addition with a low sloping roof was added to the rear of the house; this rear wing has two-over-two windows on its side and rear elevation. A narrow court separates the house from its southern neighbor, the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop. A two story brick rowhouse adjoins 541 7th Street to the north and a service alley abuts the property at its rear.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to add a third story atop the 1890 addition, alter the rear elevation entrance and fenestration, and enlarge the existing basement by excavating underneath the first floor. The height of the proposed third floor measures approximately 8 feet where it joins the historic house and slopes upwards at its rear to approximately 11 feet, increasing the existing 21 feet height of the rear wing to a height of 33 feet. The sloped roof would continue beyond the rear elevation by approximately 3 feet as an overhang.

The existing rear elevation would be largely refenestrated. At the basement level, which is primarily below grade, sliding glass doors would be installed. New windows on the second story would essentially align with the large first story door openings. The new third floor's rear elevation would be almost entirely glass.

The aluminum siding on the house would be removed and the underlying siding assessed for repair or replacement. The sides of the addition would be clad in synthetic slate shingles to relate it to the red slate shingles on the front roof forms of the house. The proposal also includes

restoring the distinctive windows on the front and side elevations and the removal of one first-floor window on the south, or side-elevation, of the 1890 addition.

Evaluation

The Board's guidance on rooftop additions generally discourages vertical additions but acknowledges that roof additions may sometimes be achieved when they are "not visible from street views, do not result in the removal or alteration of important character-defining features of the building or streetscape, and are compatible with their context." In the case of 541 7th Street, the addition would not be visible from street views on 7th Street, while limited views of the addition might be possible from G Street to the south (a break between 644 and 646 G Street provides some visibility of the rear elevations of houses along 7th Street). The applicant has provided photographs showing the view from G Street obstructed by vegetation, but this requires further study. The proposed addition will not affect the most important character-defining features of the house, such as its distinctive roof, which are located at the front of the building and would not be impacted physically or visually by the proposed addition. While some revisions to the design could improve its compatibility, and correct any visibility issues from G Street, it would not be incompatible with its surrounding context in terms of its general height and mass.

The Board has also sometimes given greater flexibility for roof additions on rear additions (or rear additions that are taller than the main body of the house), as long as the discrepancy in height between the two is not visible from a public street. Most recently, the Board found a project at 426 11th Street, SE (HPA #12-560) to be incompatible because the roof top addition would be visible from the public street and advised the applicant to refine the design by pushing the addition off the main body of the house to the rear ell. The proposed addition to 541 7th Street is restricted to the rear ell of the house and is distinguished from the historic building by its upward sloping roof form.

However, the relationship between the new construction and the historic house remains not entirely resolved with the Board's principle that an addition should be subordinate and deferential to the historic building. For instance, the highest point of the proposed third floor addition rises 4' higher than the roof line of the original house. While the height doesn't necessarily need to be lower than the highest point of the existing roof, it appears that there may be room to lower it slightly, which would reduce this disparity. Similarly, the overhang could be pulled in. For the roof form concept to work, the proportions need to be improved such that the roof element is reduced. The Board recently approved a project at 820 C Street, SE, (HPA #12-615) with a contemporary design for the rear which initially included a design with a "butterfly" roof on the rear ell that was somewhat taller than the façade. Working with the HPO, the applicants developed a simpler roof form and lowered the elevation. A similar reduction in the height and proportions of this roof element might similarly improve its compatibility.

The applicant has worked with the HPO to refine the rear fenestration and the addition's siding so they relate to and compliment the features and character of the historic house. However, further refinement in the fenestration is needed so that it is referential to the historic appearance of the rear elevation. A change in the fenestration, along with modifications to the addition's

height, will make the addition more compatible with the character of the house, its surroundings, and should help mitigate any visibility issues from G Street.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff with the following conditions:

- *The addition should be lowered in height at its rear so that it is more subordinate to the historic house;*
- *The applicant should continue to work with staff to refine the rear fenestration so the windows more closely relate to and compliment the features and character of the historic house.*